DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 433 278 SO 031 027

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TITLE "Coming Out/Going Home": Australian Girls and Young Women Interrogating Racism and Heterosexism.
PUB DATE 1999-04-00
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 19-23, 1999). Cover title varies from title page.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Context; Ethnicity; *Females; *Feminist Criticism; Foreign Countries; Lesbianism; *School Culture; *Sexual Identity; Sexuality; Social Science Research; Youth Problems
IDENTIFIERS Australia; *Gender Issues; Theoretical Orientation

ABSTRACT

The call for submissions from girls for a book, "Girls Talk," (Finch Publishing, Sydney, 1998) was based on the premise that girls have much to teach about the realities of negotiating ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Using the published written and visual contributions, and drawing from postcolonial, "mestizaje," and feminist theories, this paper explores the processes of "coming out" and "going home" in the lives of young women and the location of their schools and teachers in the processes of acknowledging, negotiating, and reclaiming their cultural backgrounds and diverse sexualities. The paper illustrates public and private strategies girls and young women are adopting and devising to resist ethnocentric, racist, and heterosexist educational structures and pedagogies. It also recommends pedagogical strategies that can assist all students in the recognition and engagement with difference and with multi-placed persons in schools who are constantly undertaking "coming out/going home" journeys. Contains 18 references. (Author/BT)

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# 'Coming Out/Going Home': Culturally Diverse Australian Girls and Young Women Interrogating Heterosexism and Racism

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**Abstract**

The call for submissions from girls to my book GIRLS TALK (Finch Publishing, Sydney, 1998) was based on the premise that girls have much to teach about the realities of negotiating ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Using the published written and visual contributions, and drawing from postcolonial, mestizaje and feminist theories, this paper explores the processes of 'coming out' and 'going home' in the lives of young women and the location of their schools and teachers in the processes of acknowledging, negotiating, and reclaiming their cultural backgrounds and diverse sexualities.

The paper will illustrate public and private strategies girls and young women are adopting and devising in order to resist ethnocentric, racist and heterosexist educational structures and pedagogies. It will also recommend pedagogical strategies that assist all students in the recognition of and engagement with difference and with multi-placed persons in our schools who are constantly undertaking 'coming out/going home' journeys.

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Lecturer in the School of Health Sciences at Deakin University, Maria writes and researches on ethnicity, gender, sexuality and HIV/STDs in education and health. She has also been a teacher for over a decade in a boys' Catholic school as well as the Gender and Equity Officer for the Catholic Education Office in South Australia, responsible for writing, consulting and implementing the Gender & Equity Policy for all South Australian Catholic Schools (1993). Apart from academic chapters, research monographs and journal articles, her publications include *Someone You Know* about a friend with AIDS (Wakefield Press, 1991); *Girls Talk: Young Women Speak Their Hearts And Minds* (Finch Publishing, 1998); and the recently published recently published *Tapestry* (Random House, 1999) on five generations of her family. Her forthcoming books are *Schooling Masculinities* about boys' education and health (Open University Press, 2000) and a book by boys for boys similar to *Girls Talk* which she is currently finalising with a publisher. Maria travels frequently and is available for consultancies and speaking engagements, particularly in Adelaide and Sydney.

# "Coming Out/Going Home": Australian Girls and Young Women Interrogating Racism and Heterosexism.

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**The Interweaving of 'Lifeworlds'**

In a collection of diary entries written during her adolescence and entitled "Coming Out/Going Home", Jess Langley (1998) writes about her coming out as a young lesbian. This necessitates her move to inner city Melbourne to 'be with people like myself and feel more comfortable in my surrounds'. She pays rent while she continues with her schooling and runs a support group for other young lesbians. Hence, 'coming out' has led to the establishment of a new cultural, sexual and socio-economic home as well as setting up a support base, another 'home' others like herself can go to. She also presents another 'going home', regularly visiting her mother in the outer suburban area where she was born and raised. Langley soon finds that this is also a 'coming out' as she and others around her become aware of how different her life and her aspirations actually are as a young lesbian completing school in an inner urban lower socio-economic area. Thus, her life is a regular journeying to and from multiple homes, multiple 'lifeworlds', where even the train journey itself is fraught with fears of violence because she dares to be 'out' as an independent young lesbian.

> As people are simultaneously the members of multiple lifeworlds, so their identities have multiple layers, each layer in complex relation to the others... We have to be proficient as we negotiate these many lifeworlds- the many lifeworlds each of us inhabit, and the many lifeworlds we encounter in our everyday lives (Cope and Kalantzis, 1995:10-11).

Like Langley, many Australian girls and young women are 'coming out' and 'going home' in the negotiation of potentially homogenising and conflicting categories such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, indigeneity and other factors such as class and disability. In other words, they are assertively interweaving 'lifeworlds', positioning themselves and others as home-sites of confluence and intermixture, rather than as having to assimilate to one 'world' or the social rules of one category at the expense of others. Nor are they 'intersecting' within oneself two or more neat and homogenous 'worlds' with distinct chasms between them. They are acknowledging the differences <u>within</u> as well as <u>between</u> categories. I use the word 'interweaving' as it metaphorically represents fluidity, boundary-blurring, and the diversity of strategies girls and young women use to 'come out', to negotiate, maneouvre and resist the codes and identities of various categories.

The main question then becomes to what extent are schools acknowledging and encouraging girls and young women's skills of critical perception, critical thinking, the negotiation of differences, and the passion for social justice, that engage with diversity rather than reconstruct it as homogeneity. For example, an increasing number of girls in our schools are finding that membership to several 'lifeworlds' is apparently cancelled due to their making visible their lesbian or bisexual 'lifeworld'. Thus, although educational systems may be (far too) slowly shifting away from the denial of diverse sexualities in young women's lives, this previous invisibility may run the danger of being superseded by policies and programs that deal with non-heterosexual sexuality as something separate from, indeed somewhat 'deviant' from, other aspects of girls' lives. Thus, just as educators have recognised the necessity of contextualising gender education programs and policies according to specificities such as class, ethnicity and geographical location, so too do sexuality education programs and policies need to be contextualised.

The call for submissions to girls for my book **Girls' Talk: Young Women Speak Their Hearts and Minds** was based on the premise that girls have much to teach about the contextualisation and negotiation of categories such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Thus, alongside the pioneering work of educators such as Georgina Tsolidis (1986) which established a research model and theoretical framework for educating "Voula" or girls from non-English speaking backgrounds, I believe we need to consider how "Voula" or girls from culturally diverse backgrounds and of diverse sexualities can educate the educators and the wider society. Much of Tsolidis' work was based on listening to girls and their parents discuss their realities. Well into the 1990s, Tsolidis' work is still very relevant as multicultural and multisexual girls' voices are not being given equitable space and are not being listened to in many schools and the wider society (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1997).

As Jess Langley's diary entries illustrate, girls growing up in Australia are undertaking three complex social processes of 'coming out/going home' in relation to categories such as ethnicity, sexuality, gender, rural/urban sites, religion and class: the critiquing and interweaving of socially ascribed categories and labels within themselves; the crossing, bridging and bordering of 'worlds' and the regulations and codes of those 'worlds'; and the employment of strategies of adaptation, negotiation and selection in order to live their lives as satisfactorily and successfully as possible. Girls are resisting being trapped in the duality of what they have inherited and what the dominant group wishes to enforce, or indeed any single set of perceptions and ascriptions, keeping in mind that minority groups also tend to enforce their own conformist criteria for 'belonging'.

Postcolonial feminism and mestiza feminism, or the feminism of culturally hybrid women such as Chicanas or Mexican-American women in Latin America, are gaining significance in Australia in informing second and third generation women living within, between and beyond the borders of two or more cultural backgrounds (Anzaldua, 1987; Lugones, 1994; Molina, 1994; Trinh, 1991). Postcolonial and feminist theorists represent

individual identity as a site of the intermixture of ethnicity, sexuality and gender:

> I am an act of kneading, uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light [going home], but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings [coming out] (Anzaldua, 1987: 80-81).

Before I proceed, I wish to point out three concerns in the way these very debates, including my own, are presented. First, the very language and categories used to articulate these debates is problematic. It is very difficult to acknowledge and write about multiplicity and heterogeneity while using a language of potentially homogenising categories such as 'Anglo-Australian', 'non-English speaking background', 'Asian', 'Middle Eastern' . Likewise, queer theory is interrogating the potential rigidity and limitations that labels such as 'lesbian' and 'bisexual' can imply.

Second, this system of categorisation also denotes hierarchical dualisms as in the use of the words 'mainstream' and 'minority', 'English-speaking backgrounds' and 'non-English-speaking backgrounds', 'heterosexual' and 'lesbian'. Diversity is recognised but it may be difficult to destabilise a perceived Anglo-centrism marked by class privilege and heterosexism.

Third, this system creates gaps and invisibilities where the realities of many girls are ignored, such as girls from non-Anglo cultural backgrounds whose first language was English, girls who are multi-cultural in ancestry rather than bicultural, girls who may be in loving relationships with other girls but find the Western construction of 'lesbian' alienating or irrelevant in their cultural contexts. Likewise, the way factors such as class, urban/rural geographical background and present location, religion, level of education, ability/disability, age, sexuality influence and interweave with issues of migration, ethnicity, and language may be ignored (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995; 1996).

Having stated all this, a path out of this 'to label or not to label and what to label' impasse, and which Australian girls are increasingly aware of and travelling, is to use these labels and categories critically and strategically. In other words, it is important to acknowledge the political use of these labels in addressing socio-cultural specificities while simultaneously being aware of and preventing the manipulation of these categories to establish new artificial constructions of exclusion, invisibility and discriminatory boundary-marking. As Trinh T. Minh-Ha writes:

> Multiculturalism does not lead us very far if it remains a question of difference only between one culture and another...To cut across boundaries and borderlines is to live aloud the malaise of categories and labels; it is to resist simplistic attempts at classifying; to resist the comfort of belonging to a classification (1991:107-108).

Hence, in line with postcolonial and mestiza feminisms, girls' writings in **Girls' Talk** seem to illustrate the significance of five main points in articulating multiple

identity and/or multiple oppression . They are:
* acknowledging *intracategory* differences *within* a group as well as *intercategory* diversity *between* social groups;
* exploring the *relationships between various conditions and constructs* such as ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, geographical location and education;
* understanding that racism, sexism and homophobia are interconnected as they are all forms of prejudices and discrimination;
* acknowledging definitions and identities as in constant processes of shifting and fluxing rather than static via *contextualization of time and place;*
* upholding one's own *self-ascriptive perceptions, definitions and meanings and showing agency* in resisting, subverting and negotiating externally assigned labels.

**Australian Girls and Their Journeys Into Cultural 'Lifeworlds'**

From many submissions to **Girls' Talk**, it is apparent that by the late Nineties, many immigrant and second-generation girls *are* speaking various forms of feminism and *are* part of the multiplicity of feminism itself , and this does *not* require comparison to some 'norm' of feminism as defined by a dominant group. Instead, it requires what Yuval-Davis (1994) terms 'transversal politics', what Lugones (1990) terms 'world-travelling' in order to prevent antagonisms and misrepresentations. However, both of these feminists, as well as Australian feminists such as Ang (1996), concede that some differences and ambivalences may not be resolved but may be used creatively and strategically in order to reach and involve all girls within their own multiple locations.

Girls appear keen to explore five social processes:
1) exploring cultures and cultural change within the broader framework (the political, social, economic contexts), and thus seeing cultures as being continually reshaped and dynamic;
2) exploring the impact of migration such as identifying adaptation strategies; stages in the process of migration such as grieving, 'culture shock', romanticising the past culture; how and why migrants might retain and cherish the past; and how and why they identify strongly with others of similar background;
3) exploring the self of the first culture, the cultural framework of the early years of childhood and the present home culture, thus identifying the values that are still relevant to their present lives and/or identifying the changed expressions of these deepest values;
4) exploring the self of the second culture, the contributions and new outlooks, the reinforcement of the first culture perspectives and the points of contradiction and conflict;
5) exploring the self in many cultures: the self that has continued to be, the self that becomes fragmented, the self that is lost, the self that is imposed, how to enjoy being multicultural and indeed value the psychological and social skills gained in negotiating differences and diverse situations.

In "White, Anglo and Middle Class", Nathalie Roy (in Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998) takes the very categories that have been constructed to position her within some notion of socio-economic and cultural 'mainstream' and deconstructs them to reveal the multiplicity

within:

> I refuse to accept a racist ideology that says all white experience is Anglo experience. It tears me apart when I see the way Australia is heading back to its genocide beginnings and constructing a white mainstream to support its racist policies. And it angers me even more when people assume I'm part of this racist Anglo majority based on the colour of my skin.White does not mean woman. White does not mean me. White means being racist and patriarchal.

Identifying herself as a young feminist, from a lower socio-economic background, and with a Welsh migrant mother, Roy demonstrates how those positioned as "white, Anglo and middle class" are not always so. She has 'gone home' by looking into the label British, finding the hierarchies within, and refuting the standard denial of the diversity within "white" people (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 232).

Young Muslim women and girls write of their need to understand the differences between Islam as a religion and Islam as a patriarchal culture before they could 'come out' and 'go home' as Muslim and female in Australia. This means resisting the stereotype that is imposed from non-Muslim perspectives as well as internalised by Muslims in an effort to assimilate to Western constructions of feminist power and identity that the veil always signifies ignorance and oppression. In "A Metre of Chiffon", Ayse Uyguntemur (in Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998), a young Sunni Muslim woman of Turkish descent and born in Australia tells of what made her 'fall from the pedestal of ... Australian Turkish Modern Woman' not only in the eyes of the external Western world but also in the eyes of her Turkish migrant family: 'I could never have imagined that a one metre square piece of chiffon could have made such a dramatic difference'. Wearing the hijaab for her signifies

> I believe in rights for women...I *am* a feminist...I am not a victim, and certainly not a second class citizen as you may think Islam classifies me... I was born in Australia, have lived in Australia, in fact have never left the east coast of Australia but I'm too dark to be an "Aussie" I guess. And, well, I do wear the hijaab, so I am considered a "radical Muslim" by my family and Turkish community. Therefore, they don't consider me "one of them"(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 205-6)

She explains the fine line that exists between Islamic culture and Islamic religion and how within the latter the status of women was taken to be equal to that of man, while patriarchal control has constructed unjust cultures.

Another young Muslim woman, Karima Moraby (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998) writes in her essay, "I Am Me: An Australian Muslim Woman", of the multiplicity of being born to an Australian Catholic mother who later converted to Islam and a Lebanese Mulsim father. Learning to negotiate these differences within her 'home', she realises there is another world of school that also needs to be negotiated:

> I think my first realisation that I was actually different or

> perceived to be different was when at eight I was told to stand in front of the class and my teacher said to the class, "This is what a Muslim girl looks like". I was not wearing a hijaab (a head scarf) and was in school uniform. So I looked just like everybody else. That day changed my life as I realised that even though I might look like everybody else, and feel like everybody else, this did not mean that everybody else saw me as the same (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 209).

The next few years saw Moraby ping-ponging between a denial of her Islamic self, then a rejection of her Western self, and then fully blending the Western and the Islamic to how it suits her such as choosing not to wear a veil.

> I am an Australian
> I am a Woman
> I am a Muslim Woman
> I am an Australian Muslim Woman…
> I am me…
> (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 209).

Other girls and young women write of the impact of knowing about their parents' struggles as refugees and migrants, or as women growing up under oppressive political regimes, 'going home' to understand the results of such experiences on family members before being able to 'come out' with aspirations and resolutions for their own lives. For example, Ruiyi writes about her mother's educational and career aspirations having been thwarted by the Cultural Revolution in China. Her tenacity in eventually returning to her studies and becoming an engineer and as Ruiyi says, always trying to 'master more knowledge' has deeply affected the way Ruiyi sees her own education and ambitions (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 99).

Likewise, young women of diverse Aboriginal backgrounds such as the 1997 Human Rights Award Winner Tammy Williams, reflect upon the struggles and determination of their forbears, and how these battles have provided the opportunities that Tammy's generation can use to continue working for equality and anti-racism:

> As I look back on the lives of my grandparents, and even my mother's life, I realise I am speaking before you with thanks to their personal dedication and commitment to reconciliation. It is the struggle of our forbears, which has resulted in my generation ...[being able to] enjoy the right to have access to secondary and tertiary education. A right which not even my mother could enjoy (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 262).

**Australian Girls Journeying Against Heterosexism**

Girls are situating homophobia and heterosexism within the parameters of human experience of oppression and marginalisation rather than positioning these prejudices as outside or deviant from the 'usual' prejudices. They do not need to identify as lesbian or bisexual themselves to be affected by and/or actively challenging homophobia. In her

personal essay entitled, "Are You The One With The Gay Brother?", Simone Garske (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998) reflects upon the homophobic harassment she experiences in high school because of her brother who had come out as gay and had left the school a few years before: 'I was like a walking disease; I had the gay virus and I might pass it on to the heterosexual guys' (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 135). Homophobic graffiti appears on her house and she experiences abuse on the bus such as food being thrown at her. Despite parental support and complaints, the school offers minimal support.

> I realised I was being ruled by these gutless wonders, both students and teachers, at school. I had a wonderful family who loved and supported me. My brother was a fabulous person who was gentle and caring (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 136).

She realises it is up to her to resist the homophobic harassment and 'comes out' confidently and outspokenly as the sister of a gay brother within an unsupportive educational institution, as well as 'goes home' to an appreciation of the 'world' of acceptance and strength in her family environment. She also positions herself as 'living in the real world' where sexual diversity is acknowledged and supported rather than the unreal world of homophobia and heteorsexism in education. This successful personal negotiation of the tensions between her 'worlds' of existence has her locating a space for herself where she can live 'exactly the way I want and I'm extremely happy' (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 137).

Girls with gay or lesbian parents are also aware of the need to negotiate and bridge the chasms between their 'home' realities and the labels and ignorance of the worlds of school and society. Rebekah Venn-Brown (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998) writes about what happened when her father, a Christian minister, came out as gay and left her mother to live with a man when Rebekah was fifteen. In "You Can Either Get Better or Bitter", she stresses she had no support at school: 'No one recommended counselling, a support network- education and information- absolutely nothing.' So she begins to educate others. When some students in her English Literature class are disgusted that one of the authors they are studying is gay, she asks the teacher if she can address the class for just a few moments.

> He agreed. I told the class of my concern at their narrow-mindedness. And then I told everyone my father was gay and that if I could be accepting surely they could also. It left the class stunned- and I gave myself a pat on the back (Pallotta-chiarolli, 1998: 92).

She is also aware of the social constructions of gender and sexuality as her father and herself move within and between their 'lifeworlds':

> I've also seen a strange parallel- as I was developing, physically and mentally, into a woman, Dad was changing also. He was dealing with changing into a gay man. Just as my changes were subtle and little by little, so were his (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 92).

In "Your Mum's a Lezzo", thirteen year-old Sally (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998) clearly

understands that 'the problem is not having a lesbian mum but having a lesbian mum in this homophobic world. So really everyone else has got the problem if they can't accept it' (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 106). She has developed what she calls 'categories, the people who know and the people who don't know', slotting people into these categories in order to assist her in negotiating her 'lifeworlds' of school, home, and small rural community in New South Wales (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 107). Again, the school environment is seen as perpetuating a heterosexist mythology about families that alienates some students who belong to a 'home' reality that has no official place in school life.

Interviews with lesbian students conducted by Michelle Rogers (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998) reveal their strengths and resistances in negotiating their 'lifeworlds' as they both 'come out' to the wider society, in their schools, and 'go home' to themselves, as young lesbians. They critically question and deconstruct institutional rhetoric as Lisa does: 'I know one of the mottoes of our school is like 'enabling you to find out who you are' and I'm not sure how the school would react if someone was very openly 'out' (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 139). And again, support in the family 'home' compensates for and subverts the condemnation from school and society as in Shaz's situation: 'I've never really had a problem with my sexuality because my uncle's gay and my mum's, you know, like they are like really close so I was always taught that there was nothing wrong with it' (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 139). Questioning institutional rhetoric also involves the interrogation of fixed labels of the gay/straight binary divide that some school policies may be using to structure all antihomophobic work and yet which also do not encompass the broader dimensions of sexual diversity. For example, Cloe says,

> It doesn't really bug me who I am in love with as long as I am happy... I don't think any boxes can be put onto it [sexuality]. I don't really go, 'OK, I am sleeping with a girl so I am gay', you know, I go, 'I am totally in love with this person and that's what it means and that's what matters' (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 71).

Hence, girls are thinking beyond homogenising and singular categories. In "Take Three Steps Back (Into The Closet)", Tamsin Dancer (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998) from Adelaide questions the homogeneity and exclusionary practices often at work within what she had thought was a safe, accepting 'home', the lesbian community, when she has a 'brief relationship' with a male.

> I felt as though I was playing a board game and had turned up a card that read, 'You realise you are bisexual. Take three steps back (into the closet) (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 157-158).

She also challenges other forms of hierarchy and homogeneity within the lesbian and gay communities that imitate those of the heterosexual world:

> We need to question why the chic, white and well-dressed, lesbian image is so attractive. Is it a safe box for the mainstream to keep me in? There are a lot of young dykes, bi and queer women, like me, that will never fit that limited category- we are fat, or poor, or people of colour, or parents, or disabled (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 158).

Amanda (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998) writes in "Political Activism: Isn't That A Dirty Word?" about 'coming out' in Brisbane as a young lesbian looking for a space to get support for her multiple interconnected issues. She discovers no such site exists so 'I decided to start one…All of a sudden I had a political identity as the person who ran the young lesbian support group' (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 254). She had constructed a 'home' for herself which would become a 'home' others could also go to. Amanda concludes, 'dreaming about the kind of world I want to live in is great, but getting out and helping to create it is even better' (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 255).

Helena, who is of Greek background, has challenged the boundaries and rules of the wider society, the school and her Greek family and community, and 'gone home' to herself where she has stopped organising her life and actions according to external ascriptions and definitions:

> They all go, 'This is a heterosexual school and you shouldn't be here'…I don't see a name on the wall saying this is a heterosexual school (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 140)
> Mum started yelling the house down…that I needed psychiatric help…my dad spat on me about 5 times and threw things on me…Coming out and accepting it myself made me feel better as a person…before I came out I used to always be rebellious, since I came out I've calmed down…everything has calmed down (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 97).

Girls and young women are publicly resisting the combination of ethnocentrism and homophobic harassment in their schools and other public spaces. They reflect the impact of Australia's multicultural and immigration policies of the last forty years in producing a generation born to migrant parents and negotiating their multiple life-worlds, resisting external racist and homophobic ascriptions which they perceive as linked, and claiming their particular spaces within their schools and within the wider Australian society (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1999). In "Wandering", Naomi Ullmann (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998) not only presents the contradictions and paradoxes inherent within her inheritance of the Palestinian/Israeli nationalist chasm, 'a Jewish state Palestinian land/ Arab killing Jew Jew killing Arab' and the added intricacies and insights of living in a multicultural Australia where she is forming friendships with Palestinian and other Arabic girls such as Julieanne, Australian-born with Arabic grandparents who tells her

> it's important to me that the Jewish people have a safe place to live…have somewhere for their children…but it's just as important for everybody else too. No one deserves it more than anyone else (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 212).

Ullmann also presents the complexity of "Jew killing Jew" by interrogating her ancestors' complicitness in the condemnation and destruction of homosexual Jews.

> "HOW CAN YOU, OF ALL PEOPLE, WHO HAS BEEN PERSECUTED YOURSELF, PERSECUTE OTHERS?"
> I think to myself, and, out aloud,
> **"The Nazis also persecuted homosexuals".**

(Pallottta-Chiarolli, 1998: 211).

A young lesbian of Jewish background, Madelaine (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998), in "My Mentor and Friend", writes of her reaching a crisis-point in needing to negotiate and resist the codes and regulations emanating from all 'lifeworlds':

> I decided to have a mid-life crisis at age 16... I suddenly realised everything was as my parents, school and Jewish background wanted me to be. It was not me. So I started from scratch. The new me.

She goes to a bookshop to get more information and there meets Jan, the lesbian bookshop owner, who becomes her mentor and friend, who 'has great faith in me, and my ability to be anything I wanted to be.' Many possibilities are opened to Madelaine through the worlds on the bookshelves and Madelaine, affirmed with new knowledge from which to make decisions, concludes that in her life 'I will do all I can' (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 159).

In a poem "Crimes of Existence", young Aboriginal lesbian writer Romaine Moreton explores the parallels between racism and heterosexism, and the internal familial divisions external Christian and Western condemnations of homosexuality have created.

> My mother also doesn't stop
> to consider,
> that when Great Christian Leaders
> & other vilifiers of homosexuality
> call society to attention
> & ask them to jail.
>
> The queers, leso's & gays,
>
> that what they really mean
>
> is for her
> to
> incarcerate
> her very own daughter
> & make sexuality
> her crime.
> & place her daughter in the cell
> next to
> her very own son,
> for they have already made Blackness his,
> (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 222).

Again, the contextualisation of lesbian sexuality according to other categories such as indigeneity, and the multiple identities many students have, are inadequately addressed in schools. As I have explained via the above examples, schools and teachers are in a significant position to act as cultural mediators between student and family/community, student and mainstream society, and student and social services/organizations/community

groups that cater for their ethnic, gender and sexual identities to foster more just understandings and practices (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995, 1996). And yet, this position is not acknowledged at all, or reluctantly conceded, or faces tremendous obstacles in establishing viable policies, programs and practices with students.

**'Multicultural <u>Does</u> Mean Multisexual'**

> I do not believe it is blasphemous to compare oppressions of sexuality to oppressions of race and ethnicity: Freedom is indivisible or it is nothing at all besides sloganeering and temporary, short-sighted, and short-lived advancement for a few.
>
> (Jordan, 1996:12)

Girls of diverse sexualities and diverse cultures are cultural negotiators in the social processes of 'coming out/going home'. Australia is witnessing both confluence and conflict as the end-products of historical forces and policies in relation to multiculturalism and homosexuality are beginning new inscriptions and resistances to long-standing discriminatory institutions such as education and Church (Pallotta-chiarolli, 1999). Culturally and sexually diverse girls and young women are coming forth/coming out as key agents in eroding long-standing exclusions and silences in relation to multicultural multisexuality in Australian institutions such as education.

The publication of girls' writings constructs powerful sites of intervention and resistance into homophobic, racist and sexist discourses. More spaces need to be provided for girls to 'come out' and 'go home', to cross borderlines and expand boundaries, to explore the contradictions and confluences inherent in the construction of their multiple social positionings as both end-products of larger socio-political and cultural forces, and beginnings of new inscriptions into society, politics and culture. This recognition of multiple locations as sites of possible oppression, power and resistance can do much to challenge ethnocentric, sexist and heterosexist perspectives. Girls need to be encouraged to gain and articulate their visions of themselves and others who co-exist with them in their schools, their immediate worlds, and the worlds beyond their perception.

Their contributions to my book have exemplified girls' great potential to demonstrate and transcend categorical limitations, oppressions, and the splitting of concurrent realities inherent in the need to homogenise, categorise and simplify. Their recognition of themselves and others as multiplaced persons, constantly undertaking 'coming out/going home' journeys can do much to challenge ethnocentric, sexist and homophobic perspectives. As Trinh T. Minh-Ha writes:

> "as long as the complexity and difficulty of engaging with the diversely hybrid experiences of heterogenous contemporary societies are denied and not dealt with, ... the creative interval is dangerously reduced to non-existence(1991:229)

The 'creative interval' between and within 'coming out' and 'going home' is becoming a larger and stronger base, constructed by Australian girls and young women. As fourteen

year-old Khizran Khalid writes,

I'm the voice of tomorrow.
I'm the one who will make a difference.
I'm the one who will see tomorrow.
But can you take the time to listen?
(Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998: 265).

Acknowledgment:

I wish to express my admiration and appreciation of the many girls and young women who submitted such thought-provoking and inspirational material to **Girls Talk.** As a parent, educator and older woman, I am in awe of your strengths, insights and determination.

I also wish to thank Julie McLeod for her encouragement and patience in the development of this paper, and her warm welcome to my working life here at Deakin University.

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